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**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
FISH AND GAME COMMISSION**

April 19, 2004

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**Support for Foothill Areas to Prohibit the Grazing of Domestic Sheep and Goats
Near the San Gabriel Bighorn Sheep Habitats
(All Supervisorial Districts)
(3-Votes)**

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD send a letter to the Foothill Communities requesting they prohibit the use of domestic sheep and goats grazing within nine miles of known San Gabriel Mountain Bighorn Sheep habitat; and send letters requesting the San Bernardino and Angeles National Forests include this standard in their revised Land and Resource Management Plans.

PURPOSE OF RECOMMENDED ACTION

The purpose of the ban is to prevent the spread of diseases that could be fatal to the remaining herd of bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) in the San Gabriel Mountains.

JUSTIFICATION

A recent analysis of surveys conducted by the California Department of Fish and Game and U.S.D.A., Forest Service, indicate the Nelson's bighorn sheep population in the San Gabriel Mountains had declined approximately 88% since 1982. The Forest Service Regional Forester formally listed the bighorn sheep as a sensitive species.

Approximately 95% of the San Gabriel Mountains are public lands, administered by the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests. In response to the dramatic decline and high level of interest in this population, the Los Angeles County Commission on Fish

and Game made the restoration of this herd a priority.

Domestic sheep and goats carry pathogens that may not be fatal to them; however, they are often fatal to wild bighorn sheep. Sheep and goats grazing near or within the habitats for the purpose fire/fuel hazard control endangers the bighorn sheep to contagious diseases carried by these domestic animals which results in mortality to bighorn sheep.

Bacterial pneumonia introduced from domestic sheep was implicated in significant population declines in numerous bighorn sheep populations. The Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests prohibited domestic sheep grazing within 2 miles of bighorn sheep habitat for over 20 years. Goats are closely related to domestic and bighorn sheep and recent evidence shows they carry diseases fatal to bighorn sheep.

A recent incident occurred in the Silver Bell Mountain herd in the Ironwood National Forest near Tucson, AZ., where a herd of 75-100 bighorn sheep came into contact with domestic goats that escaped from a lease area and mingled with the herd. Fifteen bighorn sheep contracted contagious ecthyma (CE) which resulted in lesions in and around the mouth and nasal passages making it difficult to feed, thirty became blinded and at least nine bighorn sheep are known to be dead.

Contagious ecthyma (CE) is an acute infectious disease of sheep and goats characterized by the formation of vesicles, pustules and finally thick scabs on various parts of the animal's body. CE is caused by poxvirus that can survive for very long periods in scabs of infected sheep and goats that drop into the environment and serves as a source of infection many months later. Treatment of CE is not rewarding, as the disease must run its course. Application of broad-spectrum antibiotic ointment is commonly used but has little effect on the course of the disease. CE causes reduced gain and feed efficiency and is most serious when nursing lambs contract the disease which can add a further strain on the bighorn sheep population.

The Bureau of Land Management established a standard of prohibiting domestic sheep and goats within nine miles of known bighorn sheep habitat. That standard was incorporated into the draft restoration strategy for the San Gabriel Mountains bighorn sheep population prepared by the Commission, California Department of Fish and Game and Forest Service.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no impact on the General Fund.

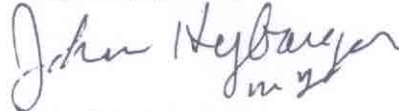
FINANCING

None.

IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES (OR PROJECTS)

This is a precautionary measure to protect the dwindling bighorn sheep population.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John H. Hybarger". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John H. Hybarger
Chairman

JHH: ml: kw

SHEEP HEALTH

Fact Sheet . . . No. 1



CONTAGIOUS ECTHYMA (Sore Mouth)

Contagious ecthyma (CE), also known as sore mouth or orf, is an acute infectious disease of sheep characterized by the formation of vesicles, pustules, and finally thick scabs on the lips, nostrils, face, eyelids, teats, udders, feet, and occasionally inside the mouth. The disease is widespread in the sheep population and affects all breeds. Lambs are generally more susceptible than adults.

CE causes reduced gain and feed efficiency in feeder lambs. It is most serious when nursing lambs contract the disease. Affected lambs refuse to nurse and may die from starvation. The infection may be transmitted to the teats and udders of ewes, causing pain and abandonment of lambs. Mastitis may also result.

Contagious ecthyma is caused by a virus that is a member of the poxvirus group. This virus can survive for very long periods in scabs of infected sheep that drop into the bedding and environment. This may serve as a source of infection for sheep many months later.

About two to three days after exposure to the virus, vesicles, pustules, and finally scabs appear on the lips, nostrils, and other affected areas. The scabs last from one to two weeks. Resulting pain causes reduced feed consumption and subsequent economic loss. The disease can resemble ulcerative dermatosis, sheep pox, and *Staphylococcus dermatitis*. A veterinarian should examine flocks suspected of having CE.

Treatment of CE is not rewarding, as the disease must run its course. Application of broadspectrum antibiotic ointment to affected areas is commonly used, but has little effect on the course of the disease. Carefully observe ewes nursing affected lambs for evidence of teat lesions and mastitis.

Vaccination for CE is a relatively simple procedure and should be done routinely in all but completely isolated flocks. The disease is commonly introduced into a sheep flock by replacement ewes or breeding rams and by contact with bedding material, trucks, and vehicles contaminated by the CE virus. The vaccine is a live, virulent (disease producing) virus that causes the disease in a location on the body and at a time of the year when little or no damage is done. In most flocks, it is best to vaccinate ewes one to two months prior to lambing so antibodies in the colostrum will protect lambs through the nursing period. Vaccinate feeder lambs at weaning time. Purchased feeder lambs are usually vaccinated for CE, enterotoxemia, and other diseases on or shortly after arrival.

Vaccination is performed by scarifying (scratching) a small area in a woolless area of the body and "painting" the live virus on this area. Lambs are usually vaccinated on the inner thigh, ewes on the inner surface of the ear or behind the elbow. When an outbreak occurs, immediate vaccination of the entire flock is usually beneficial if no more than 10 to 20 percent of the flock is affected.

CE is transmissible to humans, causing painful sores that may last for several weeks. People handling infected sheep should wear rubber or plastic gloves. Thoroughly wash exposed skin areas and then apply a skin antiseptic such as 70 percent isopropyl alcohol. The infective virus enters through small cuts or abrasions. Keep small children away from infected sheep. The vaccine can also cause the disease in humans, so take care when using it.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

*Prepared by Nolan Hartwig, extension veterinarian
File: Animal Science 9*

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914 in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.

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... and justice for all

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A recent analysis of surveys conducted by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and U.S.D.A, Forest Service, (FS) indicated that the Nelson's bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) population in the San Gabriel Mountains had declined approximately 88% since 1982.

Approximately 95% of the San Gabriel Mountains are public lands, administered by the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests (ANF and SBNF). In response to the dramatic decline and high level of interest in this population, the Los Angeles County Fish and Game Commission requested that conservation strategies were evaluated for this population. This report describes the status of the bighorn sheep population in the San Gabriel Mountains and evaluates management direction and conservation strategies.

Changes in Population Size

Three reports prepared between 1967 and 1972 estimated there were 500 bighorn sheep in the San Gabriel Mountains. By 1980, surveys provided a population estimate of 740 \pm 49 bighorn sheep; by 1988, the population had declined to an estimated 501 \pm 30 animals. Between 1995 and 2002, the population was estimated at 90 animals, with no more than 25 individuals in each of four groups in the mountain range.

Factors Affecting the Population

Between 1972 and 1980 it was hypothesized that the population changes resulted from wildfires that burned between 1968 and 1975. Wildfires benefited bighorn sheep by increasing forage quality and the availability of escape terrain. The population decline that occurred after 1982 resulted from seral changes in chaparral vegetation that reduced the availability of escape terrain and forage quality. A similar population increase and decline occurred in mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) that occupy these Forests.

The rapid decline in bighorn sheep that occurred between 1988 and 1995 could not be explained by habitat changes or disease; therefore, the only other potential explanation was predation. It is hypothesized that the mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) population in the San Gabriel Mountains increased because it was fully protected in 1972 and its primary prey species, mule deer, also increased following the wildfires in the early 1970's. When the mule deer population declined below a threshold, because of habitat changes and increased predation, mountain lions sought an alternative prey species, bighorn sheep. It appears that mountain lion predation has been reduced; however, it is still sufficient to prevent the bighorn sheep population from increasing.

Population Viability

The San Gabriel Mountain bighorn sheep population is isolated from all other desert bighorn sheep populations. The closest population is 35 miles to the east in the San Bernardino Mountains. Opportunities for genetic exchange between these populations is remote because the populations are separated by large expanses of unsuitable habitat and the communities around Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear Lakes and Interstate Highway 15, an eight-lane freeway, provide substantial barriers to movement between these populations.

Conservation scientists have suggested that the minimum effective population size for large mammals should be 50 animals. The current effective population size for bighorn sheep in the San Gabriel Mountains is 60 animals. A review of other desert bighorn sheep populations indicated that groups of 16-30 individuals were extinct after 50 years. There are no more than 25 individuals in each of four groups in the San Gabriel Mountains. More recently, the risk of extinction within five years was estimated for ewe populations in the Peninsular Mountains that were also susceptible to mountain lion predation. Ewe groups of less than 15 individuals had a 60-70 percent chance of going extinct after five years. Three of the four groups in the San Gabriel Mountains have less than 15 ewes in them. These data indicate that the entire population of bighorn sheep in the San Gabriel Mountains is at the lower limit of sustaining itself over time. Groups on individual winter-spring ranges have high probabilities of being extirpated in the near future.

Conservation Strategies

Based on the current status of the population, analysis of current management direction, and constraints and opportunities the following recommendations are provided to conserve the San Gabriel Mountain bighorn sheep population.

Immediately List the Population as a Sensitive Species

Nelson's bighorn sheep were formerly listed by the Regional Forester as a sensitive species. The FS should immediately list the population as sensitive. Re-listing the population will ensure that impacts on bighorn sheep are thoroughly considered in all biological evaluations prepared for projects in bighorn sheep habitat. Additionally, listing as a sensitive species would increase the probability that their habitat was considered during preparation of a Wildland Fire Situation Analyses. This analysis is conducted on all fires that escape initial attack and it may allow some additional flexibility in suppression strategies that could result in some habitat restoration during unplanned ignitions.

Prepare a Conservation Plan

An interagency group of biologists should prepare a conservation plan that can be implemented within one year. The plan should focus on strategies to increase the amount of management ignited prescribed fires in bighorn sheep habitat and identify the criteria that must be satisfied to remove mountain lions from bighorn sheep habitat. The plan should also address mitigation measures required to ensure that transportation projects do not result in habitat fragmentation. This plan should be adopted by CDFG and serve as a conservation agreement between FS and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to ensure the population is not federally listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Initiate a Study of Mountain Lions

Mountain lion predation is precluding the bighorn sheep population from increasing. CDFG should immediately initiate a study to evaluate the occurrence of mountain lions in bighorn sheep habitat in the San Gabriel Mountains.

Obtain Support for a Congressionally-Mandated Fuels Management Project in the San Gabriel Mountains

The national priority for fuels management is to reduce the threat of fires in the wildland-urban interface. The ANF and SBNF are adjacent to the largest metropolitan area in California; however, they receive substantially less funding for fuels management than northern Forests in more remote areas. Some of these northern Forests receive more funding because they have fuel management programs that are congressionally-mandated. A broad-based coalition of interest groups (e.g., local community leaders, environmentalists, watershed councils, sportsmen's groups) should prepare and obtain support for a pilot project in the San Gabriel Mountains that reduces fuel hazards and restores wildlife habitat for species, such as bighorn sheep, that occur in fire adapted ecosystems.

List the San Gabriel Mountain Bighorn Sheep Population under the Endangered Species Act

If a conservation plan cannot be implemented within one year, the population should be listed as threatened or endangered. Listing the population will ensure that a recovery plan is developed and implemented to preserve and restore the population. Listing the population will increase interaction between the FS and USFWS because all activities proposed in bighorn sheep habitat will be reviewed to ensure the activities do not result in take, as defined in the ESA.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR



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Saving the Bighorn Herd

Biologists making herculean efforts

Those in the Silverbell Mountains are threatened by diseases introduced by domestic goats

LARRY COPENHAVER
Tucson Citizen

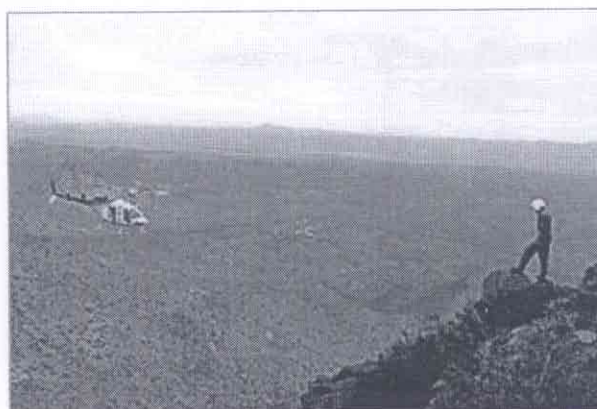
A broken hand. Battered ribs. Exposure to infectious diseases. Harrowing, low-level helicopter pursuit. Wrestling wild animals to the ground on the side of steep cliffs.

Sound like something out of Hollywood?

Could be, but this story is about the efforts of a group of wildlife biologists trying desperately to save one of the few remaining native herds of bighorn sheep in southern Arizona.

"These are people putting their lives on the line for our grandkids," said Gerry Perry, manager for the Arizona Game & Fish Department. "They have spared no effort to keep these animals around for the next generation to enjoy."

In December, Game & Fish officials reported several bighorn sheep from the herd of 70 to 100 living on the steep terrain of the Silverbell Mountains had gone blind from a form of eye inflammation called



Photos by JIM HEFFELFINGER/Arizona Game & Fish

University of Arizona graduate student Brian Jansen looks down toward a bighorn ewe that Arizona Game & Fish Department officials are trying to treat. Low-level helicopter flights through rough terrain in the Silverbell Mountains northwest of Tucson are common as wildlife biologists try to save bighorns from diseases. "There is not a lot of room for error," said Gerry Perry, manager of Arizona Game & Fish.

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keratoconjunctivitis.

In January, the officials reported a second disease, contagious ecthyma, had infected several bighorns. The skin disease causes acute sores around and in the mouth that affect the animals' ability to graze and often cause lambs to be unable to nurse.

State biologists believe both were introduced to the herd by an estimated 300 domestic goats. Those goats escaped from a herd of some 5,000 being tended at a ranch that abuts the small mountain range, about 10 miles west of Marana.

A trio of wildlife biologists use a helicopter to find and medicate bighorns infected with two diseases that can put the animals in fatal circumstances.

"These guys are flying low-level through rough terrain," Perry said. "There is not a lot of room for error."

About one-third of the bighorn herd is known to be blind from the eye disease, and eight have died, said Game & Fish biologist Jim Heffelfinger. Fifteen contracted the skin disease, though there are no documented deaths from that.

But more deaths are expected, most likely the result of the eye disease, he said. No one knows when the diseases will run their courses.

"I've never had to deal with anything like this in the 26 years I've been with the department," Perry said. "It could be terminal for this population."

Heffelfinger said he won't accept that. Regularly, for about the last two months, he and two other men have been capturing and treating the sick animals.

"We are working hard to do everything we can for the sheep," he said. "Yes, it's dangerous, and we have to have very good and experienced pilots. But we have to remember this population has been here forever. They are the last remaining bighorn (herd) that was here before white man."

Brian Jansen, a University of Arizona graduate student, and Chuck Anderson, a wildlife researcher with Game & Fish, fly with Heffelfinger in helicopter pursuits of the stricken animals.

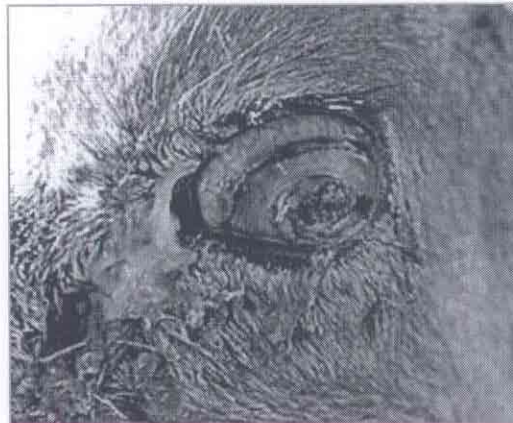
Bob Lemons, a wildlife manager with the department, worked with the three until he broke his hand capturing one of the sheep.

Heffelfinger, Jansen and Anderson also have been hurt.

Heffelfinger said he seriously bruised his ribs once, and he and Jansen have contracted the skin disease and had to be treated.

At the start of each day the group goes out, Jansen hikes into the area to monitor the location and condition of the sick animals, Heffelfinger said.

The helicopter lands about 100 to 300 yards from the animals, and the men hike in, Heffelfinger said.



JIM HEFFELFINGER/Arizona Game & Fish Department

A bighorn with late-stage keratoconjunctivitis, which can cause blindness

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"When we close in, the helicopter comes in about 30 to 50 feet over the sheep, and its noise masks our approach so the sheep doesn't know we are there," he said. "We jump the animal at the same time, grab it so as not to injure it and take it to the ground."

Anderson attaches hobbles, so the animal is immobilized. Jansen takes fluid samples from the sheep while Heffelfinger administers medications.

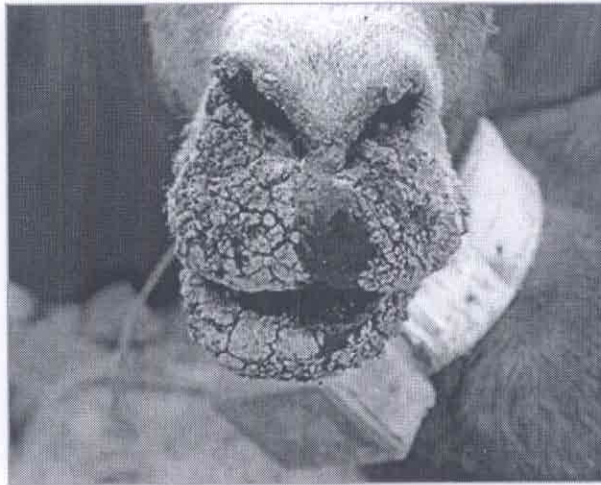
The last capture flight is set for Thursday. The next day, Game & Fish officials will do a flyover survey of the sheep.

The owner of the goat herd, George Johnson, has offered to pay for the helicopter and medication, Heffelfinger said. The bill is pushing \$19,000. Who pays the \$5,000 in laboratory fees for tests has not been determined.

That may have to come from the same sources that support the department, Perry said. That money comes from fees and taxes paid by hunters for permits, licenses and guns and ammunition.

To learn more

- For more information, go to the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society Web site at www.adbss.org.
- Those wishing to contribute to the welfare of the bighorn sheep may send checks to the Arizona Game & Fish Department, 555 N. Greasewood Road, Tucson, Ariz. 85745. Indicate on the check or in a note that the funds are to help bighorn sheep.



A bighorn sheep ewe with a mild case of contagious ecthyma, a skin disease that can impair a sheep's ability to graze or nurse

Diseases taking their toll

Keratoconjunctivitis

- 30 documented to have been blind
- 12 have died (one of those also had the skin disease contagious ecthyma)
- 9 recovered their sight and are alive
- 10 are still blind
- Several: status unknown

Contagious ecthyma

- 15 have been seen with the disease

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- 7 still have clinical signs of the disease
- 5 have recovered
- 2 status unknown

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Section: News

Diseases sicken 45 sheep, kill 8



Jim Davis / Staff

Karl Woehlecke, center, and Dave Hodges, right, load goats owned by Phoenix-area developer George Johnson for shipment from Eloy to Texas.

+ enlarge image

Animals owned by a developer invaded habitat

By Tony Davis
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The toll from an invasion of domestic goats into the stomping grounds of the Tucson area's last remaining desert bighorn sheep herd has risen to 30 blinded sheep, including eight that died.

An additional 15 sheep - out of a 100-sheep herd - have been infected with a second disease, which game officials also attribute to the goats, that could wipe out the entire lambing crop for this year.

If you go

* **WHAT:** Continuation of Dec. 18 public hearing on La Osa Ranch, a proposed 50,000-home development before the Pinal County Planning and Zoning Commission.

* **WHEN:** Hearing starts shortly after 9 a.m. today.

* **WHERE:** Building F of the Pinal County government complex, 31 Pinal St., Florence, about 70 miles north of Tucson.

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About 300 goats escaped in early November from a developer's land into the bighorn sheep's Ironwood Forest National Monument-area habitat northwest of Marana.

Of the 22 remaining blind sheep, nine have recovered their sight due to treatment, 10 remain blind and three are missing, said Arizona Game and Fish Department Regional Supervisor Gerry Perry. Veterinary tests showed the disease came from the goats.

Since late December, 15 sheep have come down with contagious ecthyma, which brings reddish lesions to a sheep's mouth and tongue and can prevent a lamb from nursing on its mother's udder.

Although Game and Fish officials don't know yet how far either disease has spread through the herd, they are seeing only about half as many sheep as they normally do. That suggests some of the missing sheep are diseased, Perry said.

The Phoenix-area developer who placed the goats on his property began shipping his 5,000 goats out of state Wednesday. George Johnson's crews loaded the first 520 goats onto a truck for a meatpacking plant in New Jersey.

The rest of the goats, now kept far away from the monument on a hay farm near Eloy, should be out of the area within a month, said Barbara Hodges, Johnson's daughter.

Johnson's proposed 50,000-home La Osa Ranch development, which would be built on private land next to Ironwood Monument, goes before a Pinal County public hearing today.

Johnson is facing possible fines or other financial charges from three state and federal agencies for the goat incident.

"I will take my lumps," he said in an interview, adding that he now believes the best thing to do is to get the goats out of Arizona.

Perry said he can't predict the long-term effect of the diseases on the sheep population. In other places where the diseases erupted, authorities documented the loss of up to 40 percent of a sheep population, he said.

"We continue to see additional sheep that are becoming ill," Perry said. "We certainly have serious concerns for that population."

Brian Dolan, president of the Desert Bighorn Sheep Society, a conservation group, called the situation "a disaster, a calamity, a comedy of errors. I don't know if anything can be done about it at all other than to find out who is at fault. But the damage has been done."

The goats had escaped through standard barbed wire cattle fences onto monument land in early November.

The Desert Bighorn Sheep Society and environmental consultants for Johnson have rounded up about 220 goats and shot another 85, said Darrell Tersey, a natural resources specialist for the Bureau of Land Management, which runs the monument.

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The State Land Department will decide in the next two weeks how much, if any, to fine Johnson, its deputy director, Richard Hubbard, said Wednesday.

Johnson was violating the terms of his grazing permit by allowing goats to cross through fences onto the monument from state land to the north, Hubbard said.

The department has also begun the process of canceling his permit to run any livestock on 1,000 acres of state land where goats had been placed.

The BLM will charge Johnson for its time in managing and overseeing the sheep problems on the monument. The Game and Fish Department has already run up an \$18,000 bill for Johnson, Perry said.

The Land Department's policies toward managing goats near bighorn populations are less strict than those of BLM. The federal agency forbids placement of any goats within 9 miles of any desert bighorn population because of the possibility of spreading disease.

By contrast, the Land Department entered into verbal agreements in 2001 and 2002 with Johnson's ranch hands to run the goats, on the condition that they would constantly herd the goats and keep them on private and state land, Hubbard said.

He said the department plans to revise its policies to forbid stocking of goats near sheep habitat if the likelihood exists of contact with the sheep.

Johnson could not be reached for comment Wednesday on Hubbard's statements. But earlier, he said the goats that escaped into the monument "got away from us. □ The bighorn sheep are a real treasure."

Dolan said the department should have taken more steps to require Johnson to keep the goats secure, and should have impounded goats as soon as they started straying onto monument land.

Hubbard replied that the Land Department doesn't have authority to impound livestock unless they've been stolen or the rancher failed to pay grazing fees.

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News & Info

Arizona News

Silver Bell Bighorn Herd in Trouble

Arizona Game and Fish Commission

 Posted on: 02/20/04 [[1 Comment](#)]

The fate of the desert bighorn sheep population in the Silver Bell Mountains 30 miles east of Tucson is still in doubt following an outbreak of pink eye in December, which has resulted in 30 bighorns going blind and 12 of those animals dying.

Arizona Game and Fish Department biologists have been routinely flying the area to capture and treat bighorns for keratoconjunctivitis—commonly known as pink eye. DNA testing shows that the bighorns caught the disease from domestic goats that escaped from an adjacent grazing lease near the Ironwood National Forest.

Gerry Perry, the Tucson regional supervisor for the Game and Fish Department, says the Silver Bell Sheep population is historically and biologically significant. "This bighorn population has been there since the Pleistocene era. In fact, it is the only remaining indigenous population of bighorns in southern Arizona. Therefore, it represents an irreplaceable source of genetic variation for desert bighorns."

Here is the current status of the 30 bighorns documented as being blind:

- 12 bighorns have died—five from malnutrition or starvation, five from mountain lion predation, and two are awaiting necropsy to determine cause of death.
- 10 have recovered their sight and are doing well.
- The status is unknown for the others.

Blindness is not the only medical problem facing the Silver Bell sheep population. The bighorns are also suffering from another disease called contagious ecthyma, which is also known as sore mouth. It is an acute infectious viral disease of sheep and goats that causes skin lesions. Such lesions can cause a mother to refuse to nurse her baby. This is the lambing season for bighorns.

Biologists have documented 16 bighorns with sore mouth. Here is their current status:

- Five still have clinical signs of the disease (one is a lamb that is apparently still nursing).
- Six have recovered.

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- The status of three animals is unknown.

- Two bighorns have died: the deaths were related to the fact that they were blind, rather than from sore mouth.

The outlook is not good. "We are concerned because we could lose a large portion of the bighorn sheep lamb crop this year in the Silver Bells, which further compounds the losses due to disease. I don't like to sound pessimistic, but this could become a dire situation for this bighorn population," Perry says.

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